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National Intelligence Estimate

Liberia: Peace Process Unraveling as Fighting Intensifies

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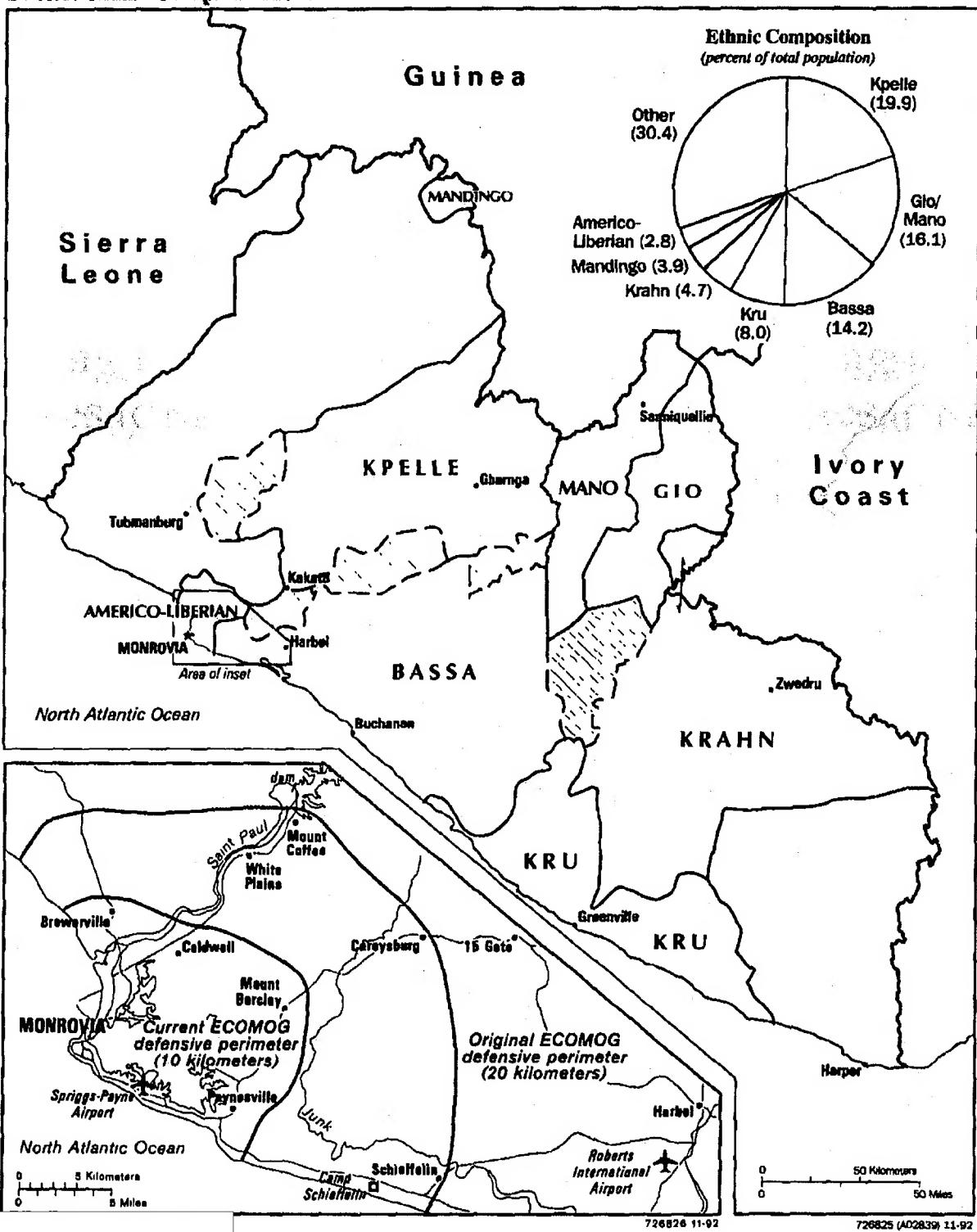
Liberia: Peace Process Unraveling as Fighting Intensifies

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Selected Ethnic Groups of Liberia



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Key Judgments

Prospects for a peace settlement over the next six months are dim. The Nigeria-dominated West African Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) has committed itself to a military offensive, and rebel leader Charles Taylor remains intransigent. The Nigerian buildup of ECOMOG may lead Taylor to renew talks, but we believe he has little incentive to be flexible:

- The ECOMOG decision undermines the force's credibility as a peacekeeper and increases the likelihood of broader ethnic warfare.

ECOMOG's chances of bringing Taylor to heel are decreasing, and there is a better-than-even chance that after a round of intensified fighting a military stalemate will develop. Splits among regional leaders over strategy in Liberia continue to widen, and we believe domestic concerns will undermine the willingness of key ECOMOG participants to sustain their commitments beyond the end of the year:

- The 9,000-man ECOMOG force has a military advantage over Taylor and will inflict some defeats on him, but poor command and control, logistic problems, and reluctance to sustain heavy casualties undercut its edge.

Taylor has built up his arms stocks recently and is capable of fighting an effective insurgency well beyond the six-month period of this Estimate. Fear of ethnic retribution from anti-Taylor forces allied with ECOMOG will help Taylor overcome dissension in his ranks and motivate his troops.

West African leaders and the warring factions all see potential benefits from greater US and UN involvement, particularly in monitoring and financial assistance. Heightened outside involvement would give regional leaders a face-saving way to reduce their commitment and shift the burden to the international community.

ECOWAS Peace Process

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has been trying to find a peaceful solution to the Liberian crisis since June 1990 when local mediation failed. When it also failed to arrange a cease-fire, ECOWAS deployed a peacekeeping force in August 1990 to protect West African citizens stranded in Liberia and to prevent instability from spreading to neighboring countries. ECOWAS continued its mediation efforts throughout the next year and, after lengthy negotiations, the Yamoussoukro IV accord was signed on 30 October 1991 by key West African leaders, the Liberian interim government in Monrovia, and rebel leader Charles Taylor. [redacted]

ECOWAS leaders still consider the accord to be a blueprint for ending the fighting and creating an atmosphere in Liberia conducive to holding national elections. The document calls for ECOMOG to encamp and disarm the warring factions and monitor all ports and airfields. It calls for an election commission to organize and hold elections within four months after security considerations are resolved. [redacted]

Implementation of the accord, however, has floundered from the beginning as Taylor has failed to abide by its provisions. He has interpreted implementation details to his own advantage, failed to demobilize his forces, insisted on retaining control over weapons, and circumscribed or imposed conditions on expansion of ECOMOG monitoring operations into his territory. Taylor's reluctance to implement the accord stems from his belief that anti-Taylor rebel groups, which did not sign the accord, threaten his forces if he disarms. Moreover, Taylor remains determined to assume the presidency of Liberia and has viewed the accords as a hindrance. [redacted]

Given its historical role in Liberia, the United States will come under further pressure to assume significant responsibilities, especially if a humanitarian crisis develops. Further US military assistance to ECOMOG would erode US credibility as an honest broker in Taylor's eyes, however. [redacted]

Alternative Outcomes

Taylor Overruns Monrovia. There is a fair chance that he will succeed. This scenario would be more likely if ECOMOG withdraws before a peace agreement is in place. Chaos and atrocities would be likely initially, but Taylor probably would gradually pacify the country:

- Taylor would want good relations with the United States, but other external actors such as France would gain influence.

Backsliding Into Chaos. There is some chance of this. Such a scenario would be more likely if Taylor is ousted or killed and his National Patriotic Front dissolved. It could also happen if anti-Taylor forces go on an ethnic rampage, or if ECOMOG withdraws and Taylor is unable to gain control of the capital from other warring factions.

A Workable Peace Settlement. There is a slight chance that external pressure, war weariness, and growing internal problems could lead to this result. Prospects for this scenario would improve if credible mediators, such as the United States or the UN, were involved.

List of Acronyms

AFL—Armed Forces of Liberia

ECOMOG—West African Cease-Fire Monitoring Group

ECOWAS—Economic Community of West African States

IGNU—Interim Government of National Unity

NPFL—National Patriotic Front of Liberia

ULIMO—United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy

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Discussion¹

Rebel leader Charles Taylor's intransigence and the recent decision of the West African Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) to take military actions against Taylor further dim prospects for a peace settlement, undermine ECOMOG's credibility as a peacekeeping force, and increase the risk of broader ethnic warfare. The fragile ceasefire in place since late 1990 was broken in August when anti-Taylor forces of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO), with support from ECOMOG, overran Taylor's forces in much of northwestern Liberia. Taylor responded with limited action against ULIMO that led to clashes with ECOMOG soldiers. In recent weeks, Taylor's forces have been increasing pressure on ECOMOG's defensive perimeter around Monrovia. The 9,000-man regional force is reinforcing for an offensive amid splits among key Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) players over strategy in Liberia. The deteriorating situation led to the evacuation in late October of nonessential US personnel and other unofficial Americans.

Shifting Dynamics Among Key Actors

Peacekeepers Become Belligerents. Increasingly frustrated by Taylor's refusal to implement the Yamoussoukro peace accord and his humiliation of peacekeeping troops, ECOMOG is embarking on a military offensive designed to force a weakened Taylor back to the negotiating table by the end of the year. Nigeria, the dominant force in

¹ This Estimate was requested by the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. It assesses likely developments in Liberia over the next six months.

Nigeria—Taking The Lead in ECOWAS

As founder of ECOWAS and the largest state in West Africa, Nigeria probably pressed for ECOWAS intervention in Liberia to expand its leadership role in the region. Having invested considerable money and prestige in the effort, Abuja is unlikely to risk national embarrassment by withdrawing under pressure from Taylor, but senior military officials underestimate what would be needed to quash Taylor. Nonetheless, growing domestic concerns, increasing costs, and flagging support in the military and among civilian officials are leading President Babangida to attempt a quick resolution of the crisis.

ECOMOG, has provided an additional 2,100 troops and probably is willing to send more reinforcements. ECOMOG currently is trying to drive rebels out of artillery range of the capital, is conducting air and naval strikes against rebel-held towns and resupply routes, and is providing weapons, ammunition, and other support to several anti-Taylor Liberian groups.

ECOMOG's limited military capabilities and domestic political factors in member states, however, are likely to keep it from quashing Taylor. The regional force has a military advantage over Taylor and appears

capable of defending Monrovia against a frontal assault. But, Taylor's ability to penetrate ECOMOG's perimeter around Monrovia highlights ECOMOG's weaknesses.

These include [redacted] and command and control, logistic problems, difficulties countering Taylor's small-unit tactics, and a reluctance to sustain heavy casualties. These weaknesses are likely to become more important the longer the current round of fighting lasts and the farther ECOMOG pushes out from the capital. In addition, Nigeria, Senegal, and Ghana—countries that provide the bulk of ECOMOG forces—hold national elections in the next few months, and domestic concerns in member states coupled with the financial burden of peacekeeping are likely to weaken their commitment. Senegal already is making contingency plans to withdraw its forces but has agreed to stay on for now. [redacted]

Widening splits within ECOWAS—the regional group under whose auspices ECOMOG was deployed in 1990—over strategy in Liberia will further damage ECOMOG's prospects. Countries with troops in ECOMOG, including Nigeria, Senegal, and Guinea, favor a hard line against Taylor. Those without troops in ECOMOG, particularly Ivory Coast and Burkina, oppose such an obviously partisan role and Nigeria's growing domination of ECOMOG. Indeed, reporting indicates that Burkina—a longtime patron of Taylor—maintains military support to him and threatens even the limited consensus that has existed up to now. Without a regional consensus, an effective arms embargo, international commercial sanctions, and requests for UN involvement will be difficult. [redacted]

Taylor Ready To Fight and Talk. Taylor, who has long doubted ECOMOG's neutrality, sees it as his principal enemy because of

Liberia's Wartime Economy

Liberia's economy is in shambles; the country's GDP is probably only 25 percent of the level achieved before the war. Most businesses are operating at significantly reduced levels and unemployment and underemployment are major social and economic problems. Although the Interim Government has been able to restore basic services in the capital, its limited tax base has prevented it from doing more than the bare minimum. [redacted]

Meanwhile, Taylor's control over much of Liberia's exportable resources—including minerals, rubber, and timber, which accounted for about half of the country's pre-civil war annual GDP—has provided the NPFL with revenues to sustain its activities. The NPFL has resumed some commercial operations formerly run by expatriates and has negotiated with several foreign concession holders to resume operations. Moreover, although much of the country's infrastructure has been destroyed, the economically important rail line from the northern mining center at Yekepa to the port city of Buchanan continues to function. An NPFL-run front company operates the port, which is the terminus for imports of food and for commercial exports. [redacted]

its military actions and rearming of predominantly Krahn anti-Taylor forces intent on retribution against his National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). ECOMOG's new aggressiveness, including Nigerian airstrikes

on rebel-held towns, its support for anti-Taylor factions, and splits among key West African leaders over strategy toward Taylor have stiffened Taylor's resolve to resist. [redacted]

Taylor's strategy remains unclear, but he probably realizes that a direct attack on Monrovia would be unlikely to succeed. Consequently, he probably will continue to rely on small-unit guerrilla tactics to raise the cost—both in lives and treasury—in hopes that he can undermine ECOMOG and break the morale of the "peacekeeping" force. Taylor rejected the recent cease-fire ultimatum from ECOWAS but, fearing a Nigerian buildup, he appears more amenable to returning to negotiations. Taylor probably believes that, if he can outlast ECOMOG by dragging out peace talks, he can gain a peace settlement on his terms or an outright military victory. [redacted]

In anticipation of extended fighting and an arms embargo, Taylor has built up his arms stocks substantially in recent months and is capable of fighting an effective insurgency for some time. Taylor has imported large amounts of weapons and ammunition—including antiaircraft artillery and vehicle-mounted heavy weapons. Burkina reportedly is providing at least a hundred soldiers, and President Compaore is serving as a conduit for money and arms. Taylor also employs mercenaries from several neighboring countries. Libya provided assistance in the past, and there is some evidence of continuing support. [redacted]

While Taylor has had major problems with dissension within NPFL ranks, the current military threat is minimizing infighting and motivating his troops to fight because of fear of retribution from anti-Taylor forces. But

Where Do the French Stand?

French interest in the Liberian conflict is driven by desire to increase its influence and commercial interests outside Francophone Africa, to protect Franco-phone allies against instability, and to counter Nigerian hegemony. Paris believes a lasting settlement is impossible without Taylor's support and has encouraged regional leaders to proceed gradually to build confidence among all parties. French contact with Taylor has increased markedly as he solidified his control in the countryside. Taylor's perception of continued French support may be encouraging his intransigence. Paris is likely to use its position as Security Council chairman to stress Taylor's concerns and probably would oppose sanctions against him. France, however, probably would support Taylor's efforts to secure greater US and UN involvement in Liberian negotiations. [redacted]

indiscipline and ethnic tensions will continue to bedevil his forces and may again put Taylor at risk. Taylor, an Americo-Liberian, has been at odds with his Gio and Mano commanders—he narrowly avoided assassination in August—and has executed some for disloyalty. [redacted]

Resurgence of Anti-Taylor Groups. To increase military pressure on Taylor, ECOMOG is rearming anti-Taylor groups dominated by ethnic Krahns, greatly increasing the risk of another outbreak of ethnic

warfare similar to that which occurred in Monrovia in 1990. Despite protests to the contrary, ULIMO and elements of former President Doe's Army (AFL)—ECOMOG's two principal allies in Liberia—almost certainly hope to regain Krahn supremacy in Monrovia. Leadership squabbles, however, have prevented the two groups from merging, and both remain dependent on ECOMOG for military support. ECOMOG hopes to control these groups for its own purposes, but it is having discipline problems with them.

AFL soldiers have set up checkpoints in Monrovia and are harassing and detaining members of other ethnic groups.

Liberia's Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU), established in mid-1990 under ECOWAS' auspices, has created its own small military force, contributing further to ethnic tension in Monrovia. IGNU President Sawyer hates Taylor and is urging ECOMOG to be more aggressive against the rebel leader. Sawyer has been trying to broker an agreement between ULIMO and the AFL, but he has little influence over either group and almost certainly fears they will eventually try to overthrow him.

The Most Likely Scenario

Military Stalemate Likely To Develop . . .

ECOMOG is likely to go on the offensive and probably will inflict some battlefield defeats on Taylor, but after this round of intensified fighting the odds are better than even that a military stalemate will develop. ECOMOG, with assistance from ULIMO and the AFL forces, will first try to push Taylor's forces out of artillery range of central Monrovia.

The regional force also is likely to continue airstrikes in rebel-held territory and, once planned reinforcements arrive, probably will try to capture Roberts International Airport—a key entry point for goods and weapons into Taylorland—and possibly other nearby NPFL strongholds. ECOMOG, however, is likely to stop short of major operations deep into Taylorland because of potential logistic problems and concern over domestic reaction to heavy casualties.

Taylor is unlikely to launch a direct assault on Monrovia but will use guerrilla warfare and long-range artillery to create havoc behind ECOMOG lines. Taylor has shown his forces can penetrate the capital's defenses, and, with covert supporters already in Monrovia, he will attempt to undermine the city's security. Taylor probably cannot hold Roberts International Airport against a determined ECOMOG attack, but he will make such an operation costly and disrupt ECOMOG's lines of communication. The loss of the airfield would hurt Taylor logistically and psychologically, but he has alternative resupply routes. In addition, his troops, spurred by ethnic hatred and fear of Krahn retribution, probably would continue to fight.

Intensified fighting will spur ethnic tension and increase the likelihood of atrocities. Primarily concerned with Taylor, ECOMOG will have trouble handling other unruly armed factions, particularly if living conditions in the capital deteriorate because of food or water shortages, higher prices, and an influx of refugees. Taylor also is likely to provoke incidents in the capital to inflame ethnic passions.

Military Balance of Forces

West African Cease-Fire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG): 9,000 troops from seven West African countries deployed primarily in Monrovia . . . nine infantry battalions, one artillery battalion, light armored elements, seven Alpha jets, two Super Puma helicopters, and eight naval attack craft . . . adequately trained with credible logistic base . . . capable of securing strategic areas near capital, but logistic problems conducting counterinsurgency operations in the interior are likely.

logistic base . . . some heavy weaponry, but few soldiers trained in their use. [redacted]

United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (ULIMO): 1,500 troops deployed primarily in western Liberia with 300 to 400 fighting in Monrovia . . . Krahn-dominated light infantry force with few heavy weapons . . . core group of 700 experienced in guerrilla tactics, but new recruits untrained, ill disciplined . . . no logistic base. [redacted]

National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL): 10,000 to 15,000 troops deployed throughout countryside capable of sustaining a long-term guerrilla campaign . . . dependent on 2,000-man core group of battle-hardened Gio and Mano soldiers and foreign mercenaries, as most troops are undisciplined youths . . . primarily light infantry force with rudimentary

Former President Doe's Army (AFL)/Interim Government of National Unity (IGNU): Krahn-led AFL could field from 1,500 to 3,000 fighters, but most encamped near Monrovia since late 1990 with little training, discipline . . . arms and ammunition shortages, no logistic base . . . Interim Government has a 500-man Guinean-trained security force . . . no logistic base. [redacted]

... **But Time Is With Taylor . . .** Taylor's concern over the Nigerian buildup probably will make him open to renewed peace talks, but he is unlikely to make significant concessions. He probably believes he can outlast ECOMOG, and he has more reason to drag out talks than to negotiate seriously. Taylor knows that ECOMOG member countries are under growing pressure to withdraw or reduce their involvement, and he may suspect that, beyond 1992, Nigeria may be the only country willing to stay in Liberia. Even President Babangida will come under increasing pressure, particularly as Nigerian casualties mount. [redacted]

... **As Regional Fallout Grows.** Renewed fighting has disrupted international relief efforts throughout Liberia, and new refugees are likely as fighting intensifies. Liberian refugees in neighboring Guinea, Ivory Coast, and Sierra Leone, which now number 650,000 after a high of 750,000 in 1990, are likely to burgeon again and further strain local and international resources. [redacted]

The Liberian conflict will further aggravate ethnic and political tensions in neighboring countries and spur the proliferation of weapons

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Key Leaders

Charles Taylor, Leader, National Patriotic Front of Liberia (Since at Least 1989)

Motivated by desire for power, personal gain . . . skillful maneuverer . . . intensely preoccupied with physical safety . . . sacked from former President Doe's government in 1983 for alleged embezzlement, coup plotting . . . African mother of unknown ethnicity, Americo-Liberian (descendent of freed slaves) father . . . age 44. [redacted]

Amos Sawyer, President, Interim Government of National Unity (Since 1990)
[redacted] vision needed to restore national unity . . . isolated by tight circle of hardline advisers . . . self-exiled in United States in late 1980s . . . mixed Americo-Liberian, Kru descent . . . age 47. [redacted]

Raleigh Seekie, Chairman, United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy (Since Early 1991)
[redacted]

[redacted] . . . probably aspires to high-level office but lacks political constituency, public support . . . of Kru and Bassa ethnicity, may be part Krahn . . . age 41. [redacted]

in the region. Failure to ensure a settlement will cause regional leaders to reexamine ECOWAS and its future. It almost certainly will dampen enthusiasm for intervention in the future, and differences in strategy—when to pull out and recriminations over

support for Taylor, for example—will exacerbate animosities among ECOWAS leaders. [redacted]

Alternative Outcomes

Taylor Overruns Monrovia. There is a fair chance that Taylor could gain control of Monrovia. Such an outcome would suggest that Taylor had a larger core of better trained fighters than previous evidence had indicated. This scenario becomes more likely if Senegal withdraws its force from ECOMOG or if a military stalemate drags on for some time, increasing prospects that domestic developments in Nigeria will force a withdrawal of its forces. Initial chaos and ethnic retribution would be likely, leading to heavy civilian casualties, refugees, and at least a temporary disruption of international relief efforts. Taylor, however, probably would gradually pacify Monrovia and eventually the countryside. [redacted]

Backsliding Into Chaos. There is some chance that the current round of fighting will spread into a wider civil war. The consequences would include heavy civilian casualties, disruption of international relief efforts, a large stream of Liberian refugees, and no prospects for a peace agreement. The likelihood of this scenario occurring increases if:

- *NPFL falls apart.* ECOMOG military pressure aggravates internal problems in the NPFL and Taylor is killed, deposed, or flees. Other NPFL leaders are unlikely to hold the group together, and Gio and Mano commanders probably would establish strongholds in their home areas. Atrocities would significantly increase. The lack of a unifying leader would handicap efforts to reach a peace settlement.

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- *Anti-Taylor factions go on an ethnic rampage.* ECOMOG loses all control over anti-Taylor military factions and the Krahn-dominated groups begin to exact revenge against ethnic groups associated with the NPFL. ULIMO and AFL units also move into Taylorland to take on the NPFL.
- *ECOMOG withdraws, Taylor fails to gain control.* ECOMOG's military efforts inflict damage on Taylor's forces but fail to quash them and a military stalemate develops. Domestic pressures force ECOMOG to withdraw before a peace agreement is in place, leading to a free-for-all between resurgent Krahn forces and Taylor for control over Monrovia. Widespread ethnically motivated retributions would be inevitable. []

A Workable Peace Settlement. Chances are slight that ECOMOG can pressure Taylor into allowing ECOWAS to broker a workable peace agreement in the next six months. The likelihood of serious negotiations would improve, however, if credible mediators such as the United States and the UN became involved and provided the same type of leadership and support they did in Angola. Even with such assistance, talks probably would be lengthy and arduous and odds of successful implementation less than even. Issues that would need to be resolved include: procedures for encampment and disarmament, authority over armed factions, composition of a new peacekeeping/observer force, and transitional and electoral procedures. []

Implications for the United States

Greater Pressure To Get Involved. The United States has provided over \$25 million in support of ECOMOG operations and over \$200 million in humanitarian assistance.

Participating countries, particularly Senegal, are asking for additional financial and military assistance. Such appeals will grow stronger as fighting intensifies and ECOMOG members consider their commitment beyond 1992. []

Although certain ECOWAS countries will continue to provide arms to the warring factions, regional leaders probably will ask Washington to endorse its arms embargo and may press the UN and United States to support full sanctions. Despite ECOMOG's current emphasis on military pressure, certain ECOWAS members are already calling for outside mediators. Once ECOMOG concludes its military efforts, a regional consensus to request UN involvement is likely to emerge. If military action fails, ECOWAS will be even more anxious for international help in finding a solution. []

Given its historical role in Liberia, the United States will come under particular pressure to play a major role, especially if a larger humanitarian crisis develops. Washington almost certainly would be asked to boost its already massive humanitarian assistance by increasing food and medical efforts and financial support to private agencies operating in Liberia, as well as neighboring Ivory Coast and Guinea. []

Washington has limited influence with the warring factions. To increase its leverage, Washington would have to boost financial and military assistance and—as in Angola—become directly involved in the negotiation and implementation of a peace settlement. Taylor, Sawyer, and other factional leaders are rarely swayed by US advice, but they

continue to contact US officials and attach importance to US support for their actions. Taylor almost certainly will continue to ask for UN observers—accompanied by a reduction in Nigerian and Senegalese troops—and greater US participation in the peace process, both of which he probably believes would give him more maneuvering room in negotiations. [redacted]

The Downside of Involvement. ECOMOG is no longer a peacekeeping force, and Taylor would view new US assistance to it as a hostile act, except US assistance to withdraw ECOMOG troops from Liberia. US and UN support for sanctions might get Taylor to the bargaining table, but it probably would compromise their chances as honest brokers in negotiations. Greater UN and US involvement also risks eclipsing ECOWAS and giving it a way to unload the burden on peacekeeping to the international community. [redacted]

UN observers in Liberia almost certainly would help assuage Taylor's concerns about

ECOMOG's neutrality, but we believe a presence as large as the 400- to 500-member group sent to Angola might be needed to ensure encampment and disarmament of the warring factions. That force cost the UN about \$150 million, of which the United States is obligated to pay 30 percent. The United States also will be asked to shoulder much of the financial costs of an election, about \$10-20 million. [redacted]

What If Taylor Overruns Monrovia. If Taylor wins a military victory, he almost certainly will work to establish good relations with the United States. He most likely would immediately turn to Washington for humanitarian, economic, and military assistance. Countries such as Burkina, Libya, Ivory Coast, and France that have supported Taylor's effort to varying degrees over the years, however, are likely to gain influence at US expense. Taylor, in an effort to secure international aid and legitimacy, probably would promise to hold elections, but they would most likely be delayed and would not be particularly free or fair. [redacted]

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National Security Information	Unauthorized Disclosure Subject to Criminal Sanctions												
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<u>also participating:</u>													
<p>The Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Department of the Army The Director of Naval Intelligence, Department of the Navy The Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence, Department of the Air Force The Director of Intelligence, Headquarters, Marine Corps</p>													
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